Names and How They affect us

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Abstract:

Our names are some of the most important pieces of our lives, and they may be more important than what we expect. Many other people take previous experiences and judge you based on previous encounters. Our names are the first thing on a resume that employers see when considering you for a job and they automatically make conclusions about that person. Employers can see from your name whether you’re male or female and even possibly your race/ethnicity. Our names mean so much to us, even more than you might expect.

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Audience: Soon to be Parents

All across the world, everybody has an identification that is given to them as a child, their name. Later on in life, a couple will start arguing about what the name of that child is going to be and they both have their opinions on what the baby should be called. In America, we have the freedom to call that child whatever we want to, and the only resistance will be your partner; the woman usually wins so there is not much sense in arguing too much. When the parents finally decide on a name, that name usually always has a gender that it’s usually associated with. Names such as Nick, John, and Brad are always names for boys, while names such as Stacy, Brenda, or Lily are names for girls. When expecting parents are trying to think of names for their baby, there is usually a gender tag, or something associated with that name, that is associated with a certain name.

Trying to figure out baby names that both parents agree on is a hard task to accomplish. Depending on the sex of the baby, you’re most likely going to give it a name that is tagged with a certain gender. According to Israel (2010), Denmark is one of the strictest about baby naming policies in the entire world—which requires the new parents to choose from a list of 7,000 baby names for their respective gender (Par. 5). With the policies being so strict in Denmark, every child has a gender specific name that is required within the country. In America, we have a lot more diversity of names because of our relaxed laws on the situation. Even with these relaxed naming laws, every parent has been conditioned around what names are for girls and what names are for boys. Ever since childhood, parents hear names such as John and see a boy, or hear Stacy and see a girls face—this is a major reason why parents name their child according to the gender it is.

In certain countries, people can get into trouble if they don’t name their child according to their gender. BBC news (2013) reported a story that occurred in 2013 Iceland, which discussed a child that was fifteen years old. They reported that he named his baby girl Blaer, which was illegal due to the baby naming policies within the country. BBC News reported that the courts claimed Blaer was a boy’s name which restricted the use of that name from girls (Par. 4). The court eventually overturned the decision and allowed the girl to keep her name. Further into the article, BBC News (2013) clarified that other countries, much like Iceland, have strict policies when it comes to naming your new born child. They said that countries such as Germany, Sweden, China and Japan regulate what parents can and cannot name their child. If you’re worried about wanting to name your child a certain name, you’d better make sure that it’s legal within the country.

American citizens have a fairly simple time with naming their child what they agree on. BBC News (2013) said "In all, there have been 20 people named Noun, 458 named Comma, 18 called Period but only one called Semicolon" (Par. 22). While I would probably hate my parents forever if they named me Noun, There are many countries with super relaxed rules when it comes to naming your precious child. They also reported that one man named Thomas Boyd Ritchie III went to court to change his name to III, however, they did not allow him to change his name due to it being "inherently confusing" (Par. 32) Future parents, as long as you don’t want to name your child with a Roman numeral, you’ll probably be fine with whatever you and your partner want to name your child.

With the future within the horizon, American citizens are starting to do and feel as they please. Gender identities are starting to become a thing of the past with movement’s such as the one that Bruce Jenner, now Caitlyn Jenner, has put on show for the entire world. Transgender in the past was almost unspeakable, even though it wasn’t illegal by any means. CBS (2013) reported California is on a whole new front when it comes to which sex somebody identifies with. They say that California is now allowing students, up to the twelfth grade, to choose which gender they identify with and can use that restroom and play on that sports team (Par. 1). This new push towards gender identity and how that person feels they are is leading to more gender neutral names.

When going to a convention, many wear name tags that identify you to other people at the event. Isis Madrid (2014) brought up a good point by saying “Dropping a “she,” “he,” “her” or “him” doesn’t typically get a second thought in everyday conversation, but it’s time to reconsider the pronoun” (Par. 1). With a rise in transgender people arising, we can’t simply say hello sir, or ma’am. Some may get offended or embarrassed because of these kinds of situations, which leaves a bad mark on the convention. Madrid (2014) offers a solution, by putting preferred gender on these name tags so people will be affiliated with the group they want.

I once ran into a very similar situation when I was working a Save A-lot when I was in high school. A teenager came into the store one day with their parents to get some groceries. I heard them say something to the boy on the way in and they addressed the teenager with the name Alex. By hearing this, I automatically assumed that the teenager was a boy. When the teenager came and asked me to unlock the bathroom door (we had to keep them locked) I automatically unlocked the boy’s restroom. Within five seconds of me opening the door and the teenager not entering, I finally realized that Alex was actually a girl. While many laugh at that story, Alex and I were both embarrassed and I felt bad about the entire situation. My entire life, I met only guys who were named Alex, so I automatically assumed that this was another guy. It made me realize that gender does not always have to be associated by a certain name or even a look.

Anna North (2010) said “A Canadian professor reports a rise in gender-neutral names” (Par. 1). She believes that there are both pros and cons to gender-neutral naming, but mostly it’s a good thing. She said in her article “it would certainly be nice if we didn't treat a person's gender as so obviously the most important thing about them” (Par. 2). She believes that gender specific names could, or does play a role in how people view her. She could very well be right, if an employer sees a gender specific name then they will start judging somebody based on their gender. If a gender neutral name is used instead, then an employer will look at the resume and judge them based on credentials. North (2010) describes within her article that she believes that names mean something to people when they hear them. She said “Naming your daughter Charlie supposedly makes her ballsy and can-do, but naming your son Sue turns him into a murderer” (Par. 3). She believes that names make an impact on your life and certain names may come with certain qualities in people.

Some people believe that certain names have to be associated with certain genders because of how we associate them. Okrent (n.d.) said “There are girls’ names, and there are boys’ names” ([Par.](http://mentalfloss.com) 1). Okrent is very fixed upon the idea that certain names have to go with certain genders, with exceptions for some gender neutral names. The author goes on to say in his article that names describe to us which gender that person is. Okrent (n.d.) said “We assume Elizabeth is a girl, and Thomas is a boy. How do we know? Those name/gender pairings match our experience” (Par. 1). Much like my earlier story about Alex, I never had met a girl named Alex so I wasn’t conditioned to think that Alex could be a girl’s name. Much like me, many are accustomed to hearing a certain name or seeing certain looks and automatically associating them with a gender.

Many people associate certain names with being a certain gender. Online, there is a website that you can type a name onto and see if that name is feminine or masculine. Does that mean that maybe America has a certain list of names to choose from, much like Denmark? If certain names have to be a certain gender then maybe there is a list, it’s just not written out and enforced. Very rarely do we see a male named Betsy or some other feminine name because we as Americans associate certain names to their respective genders. If I have a son, his name won’t be something like Peggy or if it’s a girl I won’t name her Tom. While many countries don’t have a list that enforces you to pick one from, people will pick from a list of boy names and girl names for the sake of their future. Many children will get made fun of if they don’t receive a name that is associated with their respective gender. You can search on google and find a website that tells you names that will get your child bullied at school. All across the globe, people get bullied because of their name if it doesn’t fit your gender profile. Appearance and your name are the two key factors when it comes to trying to profile a certain person, and many take advantage of both—some like to be different though and we should really respect their decisions.

Bullies terrorize people all across the globe, making fun of things like names, appearance, and mistakes. Itkowitz (n.d.) wrote his article on a little girl from Tulsa Oklahoma who was getting bullied because of her name, ISIS. The report talks about how the kids called her a terrorist and asked why she was killing U.S. soldiers (Par.1). This little girl had to deal with all of the bullies because of what her name meant to the other kids. This is a good example of what names can really do to another person such as an innocent little girl. Whether the name is perceived as being of a different gender or of a group of bad people, names can really affect your lifestyle. Itkowitz also explained that she was not just bullied by people at school, but also lost her performances that she could play at (Par. 8). This is just one example of a name that could get you picked on because of something that’s completely out of your control. Names really do mean a lot to how others perceive that person and that’s possibly why places such as Denmark have a rule such as a list of pre-approved baby names.

Names are something we are born with and take all the way to the grave with us. So how important is your name during your lifetime and does it have any bearing on what your life will experience? Konnikova (2013) explained in her article that two Harvard professors did a study to see if you’re name really did have a bearing on your life (Par. 1). She explained that they took 3300 men who graduated, looking to see if their name had any influence on their academic performance. What they found was that a person who had normal names, such as Mike, was doing fine while people named Berrien were doing worse. They concluded that names really do have a bearing on your academic performance (Par. 1). Konnikova further explains that more research was put into play and they found even more incredible results. She said Researchers found evidence to believe your name plays an influence on “choice of profession, where we live, whom we marry, the grades we earn, the stocks we invest in, whether we’re accepted to a school or are hired for a particular job, and the quality of our work in a group setting” (Par. 2). She further said “Much of the apparent influence of names on behavior has been attributed to what’s known as the implicit-egotism effect: we are generally drawn to the things and people that most resemble us. Because we value and identify with our own names, and initials, the logic goes, we prefer things that have something in common with them” (Par. 3). Maybe names play a bigger factor in our lives than what we actually see or experience in our lifetime than we expect.

Our names really affect where and what we can do with our lives. A study, which Konnikova said in her article, involved turning in a resume to companies across Chicago and Boston with names that sound as if they were from different races. She said that of those 5,000 resumes turned in, fifty percent more white sounding names received responses back from the companies (Par. 6). This goes to show that names really do have a bearing on our life because of how others perceive names of certain individuals.

Our names are of some importance to us, whether it means how people treat us or how it changes our lives. Our names are one of the only things that are born with you and die with you, so we should probably cherish it no matter what it is. Who we are and our personalities develop how others view somebody with the same name. We also perceive names to be able to tell which gender the person is. People will judge you based on your name and make conclusions from it. My mistake with Alex has been in my memories for a long time and I never really knew why I couldn’t just let it go. Writing this paper has made me realize that we really can’t judge people by their name, what they look like, or from other people.

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